Charles: When I was about 15, I had the opportunity to first meet Thornton Burgess. He came to visit with my mentor, who was one of the artists who he used in his later years for his stories. And after that, I went with her a couple of times to visit him in his home in Springfield, and then we got to know each other pretty well.

Interviewer: So this was with Phoebe Erickson?

Charles: This was Phoebe Erickson, yes. And it was at that time that I learned that he and I shared a common birthday all being a huge [indecipherable] apart. And for a number of years I lost track of him. And then I learned that he was in a nursing home in Hampton. And so every year on my birthday, I would take some animals from my Audubon Ark in ... at Mass. Audubon Society, and go and take them to visit with him and the other people in the nursing home. And that was always a big joy for me on my birthday. And that's where I got to know the person who ran the nursing home. And when the time came, after Burgess had passed on, they asked me if maybe Audubon would be interested in running a sanctuary at Burgess's place; if Audubon would accept that if they could raise the money to get it. And I checked, and yes we could, and yes we did. And that's how Laughing Brook Wildlife Sanctuary came into being.

Interviewer: Now, you wrote an article on Thornton Burgess in the 1980's?

Charles: Yes.

Interviewer: Yes. What magazine was that for, Chuck?

Charles: I can't remember right now, but I wrote an article because I was concerned that as ....

[Equipment malfunction]

Interviewer: So, you were concerned that, about what with the article that Mr. Burgess ...?

Charles: I was concerned that, at that particular time, the librarians were taking Burgess's books off the shelves. Because the idea was the kids should read a lot of stuff, not just one author, and Burgess's books were considered a series, and they went off with a variety of other children series that were going on. And so I wanted to do everything to get the librarians to put them back on the shelves, and get them back in circulation, and it did happen. So that was, to me, an important step along the way for recognizing Burgess for what he really was.

Interviewer: Do you know anything about his conservation effort like the Green Meadows Club, where his kids would go to farmers to ask them not to shoot hawks or owls on their property? Is that what that was?

Charles: That was one of the things, but actually everything that Burgess did was basically conservation-oriented. You just have to remember that conservation in those days meant something quite different

than it does today, because it was a case where he was trying to use from his stories right on through, the idea that if people loved the characters, they'd want to save the animals. And so he did that through a number of books. And then he used a lot of other techniques as well. He had the Happy Jack Club, which was, in its own right, a kind of conservation effort. They used the Happy Jack to raise money for bonds during the war time.

Interviewer: That was World War I?

Charles: No, World War II. And then he put out the cards with Dwight on Church in the boxes, so they would better understand the animals. He wrote a couple of books specifically for the Boy Scouts, showing how to study nature and so forth, with the Boy Scouts, in his storytelling fashion. And he went on; throughout his life he used the very best artists available to him who [indecipherable] to do his book of wild animals, and his book of birds. He used other good artists for his wildflowers and his seashells. Everything that he did was really geared to that. He went to Arizona in the winters and he helped set up the ARC Program that they had there, which was a masterful piece out of the desert museum. And he was the backer and supporter of that. It just seems that almost everything that he did was focused on conserving wildlife and the habitats that they needed. And yet, he wasn't, it wasn't that he wasn't ecologically sensitive. The last book that he wrote for children, when he was 91 years old, was really an ecological story that talked about the relationships between animals and environment, and how you had to protect both if you were going to have either. And I just think it was a remarkable effort throughout his life to do that.

Interviewer: You also wrote a compilation of all his sayings, The Wisdom of Thornton Burgess.

Charles: Yes, I did a little publication, which I did for Laughing Brook Sanctuary, in which I took the little [indecipherable] that he always put at the beginning of his stories, and the chapters in his stories, and compiled them as *The Wit and Wisdom of Thornton Burgess*, and they were that. Some of them were witty. Some of them were very wise in the sayings. He was not only an avid conservationist, but he was a moralist. And he focused on the things that counted for people and animals. And hopefully that document, which I've now given to the Thornton Burgess Society, can be used to make some labels for trail signs as people go along paths in that Sanctuary, to see what the wit and wisdom of this man really was.

Interviewer: What do you say to people who look at his literature now and think that some of his characters are racist? I had a woman call me up, and she was quite upset about old Mr. Buzzard and Wacky the Crow. Did you ever hear ....?

Charles: I never had any sense of that.

Interviewer: No.

Charles: Some of that comes from, unfortunately, I think, from the artwork of Harrison Cady, and the way he made up these characters and the clothes he put on them and so forth. I've always felt the worst thing that happened with Burgess's books was to have Cady illustrate them. But he was proud of having Cady. He was considered a master illustrator of his day. And Cady had asked specifically if he could illustrate the Burgess books. But he had clothes on the animals and everything, which was not what Burgess did ...

Interviewer: Right.

Charles: ... at all. So that's why after Cady passed on he went to artists like Phoebe Erickson and others, who drew much more realistic animals. She had worked for Disney at one time. She knew that the appeal of animals comes in making their face childlike. So, they have, they're realistic but they have somewhat oversized heads and larger eyes than the reality of the drawing. But they came out giving them a sense of real animals, instead of animals dressed in clothing, which was, I think the problem with Cody.

Interviewer: With Cady. I read that when he was in the nursing home they had some deer at the nursing home.

Charles: Yes, that's true. Lou Lewis, the director of the nursing home, built a large pen off the area where Burgess stayed and introduced ... I don't remember if it was four or five deer he had and fed them and he kept them there for Burgess. After Burgess died, he donated them to the Audubon Society and we built a special enclosure for them. They were actually the first, live animals that came to Laughing Brook.

Interviewer: Polly, this morning, told me about Jimmy Skunk coming to the door to get rescued from his head in a mayonnaise jar. And she had some animal stories there. So when Burgess was living at Laughing Brook there weren't animals there?

Charles: No.

Interviewer: No. They came in after.

Charles: He had his own [indecipherable] I always got a kick out of it because [indecipherable] told about the day that she and Arthur were having tea with Burgess in the main house. And this fly kept bothering Arthur. And Arthur went to swat it, Burgess says, "Don't you do that! That's my pet fly."

Interviewer: Oh, my. [laughter]

Charles: He says, "I've been sharing tea with him for the past week."

Interviewer: [Laughter] I often heard a story, when Burgess was in the nursing home, that children would still come and visit with him. There was an instance, after he'd had a stroke, where he wasn't able to speak, but they heard his voice booming down the hallway. And when they went

inside the room, he had a child on either knee and he was playing a recording of him reading the story as he pointed out the words.

Charles: I wasn't aware of that, but it sounds like him.

Interviewer: Like him, yeah. What book is it Phoebe Erickson illustrated?

Charles: I have to stop and think now; she did ... she did at least a Peter Rabbit one that I remember.

Interviewer: And did she live in Hampton?

Charles: No. she lived in Connecticut. That's where I met her, in Milford where I lived.

Interviewer: And you said you met Burgess through Phoebe Erickson?

Charles: Yes.

Interviewer: She brought you to come and visit him?

Charles: Yep. But she knew I loved his stories. So she thought I would like to meet him, and I did.

Interviewer: Did he ever share any of his expeditions that he went on?

Charles: No.

Interviewer: No. We have some home movies of him out on Martha’s Vineyard with the [indecipherable].

Charles: Yes.

Interviewer: And I guess he’s with Doctor Gross from Bowdoin College he found in Labrador, I think.

Charles: Right.

Interviewer: Looking at [indecipherable] things like that.

Charles: I knew about the [Indecipherable] situation but I never saw the film.

Interviewer: Yeah. Yeah that was, we got a little booklet from the Martha's Vineyard Historical Society ....